

VZCZCXRO1254
PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN
RUEHLZ RUEHPOD RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHSQ #0015 0141155
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 141155Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY SKOPJE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6878
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE 0145
RHMFIUU/CDR TF FALCON
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUESEN/SKOPJE BETA
RUEHSQ/USDAO SKOPJE MK
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

UNCLAS SKOPJE 000015

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MK](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIAN PEACEKEEPING HELICOPTER CRASHES,
KILLING ELEVEN PEACEKEEPERS

REF: EMBASSY-OPS CENTER TELCON 01/12/07

¶1. (U) A Macedonian Mi-17 military helicopter returning to Skopje from the EU-led peacekeeping mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina crashed several kilometers short of Skopje Airport early the afternoon of January 12, killing all eleven Macedonian peacekeepers on board. The crash prompted Macedonian authorities to temporarily close Skopje Airport. The helicopter, crew, and passengers were returning to Skopje in line with a partial downsizing of Macedonia's contribution to the EU-led mission.

¶2. (U) Embassy DAO staff inspected the crash site shortly after the incident, which occurred at approximately 1230 local time in conditions of heavy fog and in hilly terrain. In an emergency government session on January 12, a special investigative commission, headed by the Deputy Foreign Minister, was formed to determine the cause of the crash. According to local press reports, villagers in the vicinity of the incident reported hearing an explosion shortly before the helicopter went down, and a second explosion upon impact.

¶3. (U) Government protocol and military officials are arranging for the funerals of the killed peacekeepers, likely to be held on Tuesday, January 15, and to be designated a national day of mourning. EU High Representative Solana sent a message of condolence to the government on January 12, noting that the accident was "especially sad as (Macedonia) is making an outstanding contribution to the EU military operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, supporting security and stability to the region at a crucial time." The Embassy also released a condolence note, on January 13, mourning the loss of the peacekeepers, and we have lowered our flag to half-mast for today and tomorrow.

¶4. (U) Comment: This incident, involving the largest loss of life to Macedonian troops since the 2001 conflict, has dealt a painful blow to the Macedonian public psyche. Nevertheless, despite the significant loss of soldiers in a country with a military that numbers just over 7,000, there have been no calls in the public, press, or among government officials to pull the plug on Macedonia's contributions to the EU-led mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina. That is a good measure of Macedonia's steadfast commitment to international security operations abroad, including in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Lebanon.
MILOVANOVIC